

How to Be an Effective CAC Representative

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SOME SAY LEADERSHIP BY COMMITTEE is bound to fail. It is the heroic individual, alone and unaided, who accomplishes greatness. Perhaps that is partially true, but many committees have been successful as well. Fifty-five men labored together to craft the Constitution. A handful of unsung engineer-heroes saved the crew of Apollo 13. Could a single individual have accomplished those feats?

Great leaders are rare. Committees are often the more successful because they draw wisdom from the experience and insights of many. When their members speak in unison, the merit of their ideas echoes more loudly and convincingly than the voice of a single individual. By its nature, a good committee develops a broad consensus; its ideas endure because they transcend the fickle charisma of any one person.

Cadet Advisory Council. CAC is well-suited for teaching cadets that committees do indeed have the potential to lead. In August, when the CAC term changes, scores of newly-appointed representatives will meet for the first time. How many truly comprehend their role? Over the years, I have seen CACs succeed and fail. I've met cadets who understood their duties as representatives, and those interested only in wearing the shoulder cord. This essay is for you, the newly-appointed CAC representative. I hope it helps you better understand your responsibilities and motivates you to serve enthusiastically.

Purpose of CAC. Cadet Advisory Councils should always remember that "advising" is their middle name. The mission of the CAC is to advise the commander on ways to improve the Cadet Program, and for the individual cadets to gain leadership experience in the process. The CAC's job is not to plan social events or organize training programs, no matter how valuable those activities may be. It is not even their job to implement whatever suggestions they might have. Rather, their duty is to articulate the concerns of their fellow cadets and help devise solutions to those problems.

Echelon Focus. Think creatively and think strategically, but concentrate your efforts on issues related to your echelon. Several committees already focus on the grand scheme of the Cadet Program and long-term direction of CAP, but only you are equipped to represent the cadets of your echelon. Your CAC is the only body examining the status and idiosyncrasies of the Cadet Program in your area.

For example, your CAC might consider why so many cadets are bogged-down in Phase I, how to boost encampment attendance for first-time cadets, or what types of special activities the echelon should provide.

On the other hand, think twice before considering a topic beyond the scope of your echelon. For example, one CAC proposed that Spaatz cadets automatically be appointed to the Air Force Academy. That would be fabulous, but literally requires an Act of Congress. Some councils propose new ribbons for the uniform, although those ideas do not directly relate to the Cadet Program. Perhaps the least effective use of a CAC term

is to fret over the minutiae of parliamentary procedure: Remember, internal CAC policies are a means to an end.

Keep trivia off your agenda and spend your time only on substantive topics. Your commander expects you to be innovative, but not wildly unrealistic. Sensible councils, which emphasize the needs of cadets at their echelon, are the most successful.

Command Relationship. Unlike the typical cadet in your echelon, as a CAC representative you will have your commander's ear. As you enjoy the privilege of being heard by him or her, be a courteous listener, too. Share with your commander (through your director of cadet programs) the topics that you plan to explore during your term and invite him to suggest others of his own. As a cadet, you have a unique perspective on the Cadet Program and your unit, but your commander has an equally unique perspective, too. Take the first step to develop a rapport. If you are responsive to your commander, you'll earn his trust. Then, instead of merely having your recommendations *considered*, perhaps your commander will seek out your advice, thereby affording you more opportunities to affect the Cadet Program.

Core Values. I have spoken of "trust," and "duty." CACs require more than good leadership and sound management to succeed, they need members of good character. If you reflect on the Air Force Core Values, you'll see that all three relate to your role as a CAC representative.

To keep *Integrity First*, you must fulfill your responsibilities as a CAC representative. This includes attending all meetings, reporting back to your unit, following-through on assigned tasks, and speaking freely and openly during discussions.

To place *Service Before Self*, represent the view and needs of your fellow cadets. CAC representatives must not use their positions for personal gain. Also, because the CAC's purpose is to improve the Cadet Program, use your term to "give-back" to CAP and help tomorrow's cadets benefit from an experience as good, if not better, than that which you have enjoyed.

To strive for *Excellence in All We Do*, think creatively, be resourceful, and act with professionalism. Additionally, use the CAC as an opportunity to improve your problem-solving and communication skills. Most importantly, as a high-profile leader, display exemplary conduct in and out of uniform.

Looking at how the Core Values relate to your CAC responsibilities, it's easy to see that if each representative commits to and follows those values, the council is almost guaranteed success.

Conclusion. If you think committee-work and leadership are two different animals, you're wrong. Leaders articulate a vision. They persuade. Vexing problems are conquered by the leaders who cooperate and draw upon the wisdom of others. These traits are present in the best committees. They describe how new solutions are born, and how the Cadet Program is improved at the lowest echelons. As a Cadet Advisory Council representative, you are situated in a perfect environment to demonstrate your leadership skill. ♦

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